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ABSTRACT

Although it is vital to provide services to students, service providers in school districts usually work in isolation and may overlap or duplicate services. Educational institutions need to provide a wide range of student services, delivered in a comprehensive and coordinated system, led by student services coordinators (SSCs) who can serve as catalysts for effective delivery. Because of the unique and vital functions they perform, SSCs need specific leadership qualities, such as the following: abilities to articulate a vision, to listen to and understand others, to empower others through recognition and acceptance, and to take advantage of diversity. SSCs may function as designers; teachers, trainers, consultants, and coaches; and stewards. Activities that SSCs must carry out include the following: (1) find effective means of delivering services and managing student information; (2) administer integrated tracking systems for student records; (3) continuously monitor the program to evaluate and improve the delivery of student services; and (4) guide, assist, and monitor student services teams. Student service coordinators can play a vital role in leading other school personnel in the implementation of services that will enable students to succeed in school. (KC)

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# A Call for Leadership in Providing Student Services

## Office of Student Services' Brief
## Volume 8, Number 2

by Donna E. Dare
and Carolyn Maddy-Bernstein

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NCRVE

National Center for Research in Vocational Education

University of California, Berkeley

*Office of Student Services'*

# BRIEF

Volume 8, Number 2

## A CALL FOR LEADERSHIP IN PROVIDING STUDENT SERVICES

**by Donna E. Dare and Carolyn Maddy-Bernstein**

The need for educational institutions to provide a wide range of student services is critical. While it is true that many schools offer a number of services to help students succeed, few, if any, have developed a comprehensive and coordinated system. In reality, service providers in the same school or school district often work independently of each other and may overlap or duplicate services. The problem is even further compounded with the need to collaborate with community services providers.

Meeting the needs of students requires the development of a highly complex system. For example, at least to some degree, most schools provide assessment, special accommodations for students with special needs, education counseling, career counseling, academic advising, and placement and referral for further education. Some even offer mentoring, tutoring, many social services, health services, and employment placement. Few, however, coordinate all these services so that the needs of every student are assessed, a plan is in place to assist each student, and services that support student success are identified and provided. Even fewer schools and school districts have coordinated the efforts of service providers from the community to effectively supplement the school's resources.

> ***While many believe an excellent faculty and a rich curriculum are the necessary components to improving student outcomes, there is another area often overlooked by reformers—a comprehensive, coordinated student services system designed to enhance every student's chance of success. The means must be found to help all students move successfully from one education level to the next or from school to work. An efficient and comprehensive student services delivery system will help attain this goal.*** (Maddy-Bernstein & Cunanan, 1995)

## Need for Student Service Coordinators

For student services to have maximum impact on students, they must be coordinated in a strategic and meaningful way. Today's complex educational system and the complex learners who comprise the system desperately need dedicated personnel who possess leadership skills, a special set of abilities, and a deep understanding of the many needs of students. For effective delivery of student services to take place, we must have leaders we call **Student Services Coordinators (SSCs)** who can serve as catalysts for effective delivery of student services. Because of the unique and vital functions they will perform, these student services coordinators need specific leadership qualities. In addition to these qualities, the coordinators must conduct a number of activities that will support serving the needs of students in the educational process.

## Qualities of Student Service Coordinators

In implementing change of any kind, someone has to lead the way. In the culture of schools, this role is often talked about as the role of the leader. While this role is frequently assigned to people in administrative positions, the position is much less important than the qualities associated with it. As part of a culture for educational reform, the ***quality of leadership*** is vital for many positions, especially the student services coordinator.

In the Spring 1991 publication of *Issues...about Change*, Hord describes leaders as change makers. Based on many years of research on this topic, she points out that, among other qualities, ***leaders have the ability to articulate a vision***. A later publication of *Issues...about Change* (Hord, 1993) further clarifies vision as something which must be shared by those who will be involved in its realization. Together, Hord's definitions of leadership and vision imply that the leader/change maker can capture the vision set forth and can convey it to others in a way that facilitates change.

In alignment with this leadership quality, student services coordinators must demonstrate other qualities identified by Leighton (1996):

- ***they listen to and understand others,***
- ***they empower others through recognition and acceptance, and***
- ***they take advantage of diversity.***

In other words, leaders must be "others-focused." While never losing sight of the students they are serving, effective leaders will also continue to move in a positive direction.

In addition to demonstrating essential leadership qualities, SSCs must demonstrate other abilities appropriate for people in leadership roles:

- ***They are designers.*** As catalysts for change, student services coordinators must know how to turn visions into meaningful and strategic actions (Hord, 1991). They must be able to design effective delivery of services to students. The design work must be done by building a strong bridge from the larger vision and mission of the school or district to the wide range of resources available for students. Student services coordinators must have a clear perspective on the educational system and accurate knowledge of the available resources in the school, the school district, the community, and the geographic area. More importantly, through their leadership they must assess the needs of students, and they must support the effective delivery of services.

- ***They are teachers, trainers, consultants, and coaches.*** Hord (1991) describes these qualities as the ability to train and the ability to act as consultant and coach. Stolp and Smith (1995) indicate that this role has much in common with facilitating, guiding, or coaching. In this capacity, leaders plan and provide resources. However, this type of planning, described by Hord as evolutionary planning, is unique; it is guided by the school's or the district's overall development.

  Within this broader context, staff development, led by a knowledgeable and sensitive SSC, can help all parties understand their responsibilities and boundaries. Stakeholders in the delivery of student services must establish appropriate limits on their activities. In some instances, this may require them to find other resources to support functions vital to the students being served.

  Possibly the most critical of all the responsibilities of the SSC is to oversee staff development. The training function for SSCs should include teaching, reviewing, and "clarifying new knowledge and skills necessary for implementing a total student services delivery system" (Hord, 1991). In other words, what they teach should be highly strategic. Staff development must be a vital part of the implementation process.

- ***They are stewards.*** Perhaps the most frequently overlooked quality of a student services coordinator is the one which Stolp and Smith (1995) identify as that of steward. Being a steward requires commitment to vision and administration of that vision. It requires commitment to the students being served and determination for meeting the needs which will facilitate their development.

  This "others-focused" mind set—an essential quality of true leaders—describes a person who can translate vision into action. As leaders, SSCs must relate to administrators, teachers, students, parents, and student service providers. At the same time, in their role as SSCs they must pave the road to effective delivery of services. Effective communication, empowerment of students and school personnel, and appreciation for stakeholders, *particularly students*, is central to successful delivery of student services.

## Activities of Student Service Coordinators

In carrying out the responsibilities inherent in their roles, student services coordinators need to be clear in their understanding of activities that will best support their critical function. A few essential activities can give them focus and guide their daily implementation of effective delivery of student services.

- ***SSCs find effective means of delivering services.*** Ensuring that every student receives the needed services requires a systematic approach. The *case management technique* is a viable means of monitoring student needs and providing needed services to support student success. In the case management approach, every student/client is assigned a professional (e.g., counselor, teacher/advisor, special ed teacher), who oversees their individual needs or *case*. While no system is fool-proof, special educators as well as many service agencies employ the case management approach because it provides a comprehensive and effective means of delivering services. Many educators have much to learn about effective case management, which focuses on the needs of the individual.

  The information for students' case files is already available in most schools and districts, but it is not evaluated and "managed" in a systematic way. For the purpose of coordinating student services, case files should include at least:

  - standard school records (e.g., grade reports, test scores),
  - individual career planners,
  - portfolio information,
  - interest inventories or other additional assessment reports,
  - all disciplinary referrals with comments from the teacher who made the referral,
  - any awards or recognitions,
  - extracurricular activities,
  - nontraditional learning opportunities or special activities,
  - services provided to the student, (e.g., free lunches, mentors, tutors),
  - names of his/her student services team members, and
  - a list of services needed by the student with supporting information and a list of personnel responsible for providing the services.

  Furthermore, while still securing needed services, SSCs should ensure that case files are managed in a way that protects confidentiality. These files should be accurate, up-to-date, and readily available to the SSC and team members, who should be trained to use information within the parameters of the law. Educators should explore computerized software programs that help them utilize and store the information as well as track services to individuals.

- ***SSCs administer integrated tracking systems for student records.*** A primary responsibility of a student services coordinator should be to plan and implement a system for tracking student services. Many administrative software packages are being developed and enhanced to provide a "tracking" system for student information. For the purpose of providing student services, it is vitally important that these software packages integrate information from a number of sources. This recording system includes much more than test scores, periodic grades, and attendance records.

  In order to be effective, the tracking system must be able to provide input from a variety of sources, continuously monitor the system, and provide feedback for all those involved in the delivery of student services. The tracking system should protect confidentiality and must link school services with other available resources while it provides school personnel, students, and their families with opportunities to connect with other vital support services. All record keeping systems should facilitate the most seamless access to the most comprehensive services available while protecting student confidentiality.

- ***SSCs continuously monitor the program to evaluate and improve the delivery of student services.*** Hord (1991) indicates that leaders must monitor implementation of a program change. She describes this function as collecting data, analyzing it, reporting and transferring data, and evaluating data for summative and formative purposes.

  Program improvement is dependent on the ability of program personnel to use the collected data to solve problems that impede progress. In addition to the activities involved in *implementing* effective delivery of services to students, the activity of *monitoring* the large system of delivery of services for the purpose of improvement of the system will primarily be the charge of the SSCs. This monitoring function bridges the gap from managing and tracking data for students to assisting with implementation of services through service teams.

- ***SSCs guide, assist, and monitor student services teams.*** Under the leadership of the SSC, the student services teams should be charged with the responsibility to:

  - integrate all the pieces of information related to a student and determine if further assessment is needed,
  - analyze effective means of assisting the student,
  - develop a plan for providing student services to the student, and
  - monitor student progress on an on-going basis.

  These responsibilities mean that student services coordinators must function as consultants and team coaches. They must ensure that the team is comprised of knowledgeable and experienced school personnel and community services providers. They must also oversee the progress of the student services team and assist them in their work.

Under the SSC's leadership, the student services teams will develop a plan for each student with required services delineated and providers named. To do so, the teams should interact regularly with parents and students. There may be many configurations for these teams, and they may differ from school to school and from district to district. Of course, size of the school and/or the district will affect the make-up of teams.

The student services coordinator should meet regularly with student services teams and design (and redesign) student services teams to ensure that all students have equal access to student services. The size of the school or district being served will also determine the role of the student services coordinator. In most instances, the SSC will:

- oversee the work of teams and providers to ensure all students are being served,
- assist teams in planning for delivery of services,
- provide resources as needed,
- ensure that good follow-up occurs, and
- evaluate services for their impact and effectiveness with students.

## Conclusion

The role of student services coordinator is one of function over position and substance over form. Student services coordinators are not the key that unlocks the door to effective educational reform; however, student services coordinators can play a vital role in leading other school personnel in the implementation of services that will enable students to succeed in school. Wherever they are placed within the educational chain of command, they can catalyze the efforts of educators and learners, administrators and other school personnel, and schools and communities in regard to student services. Most of all, they can strategically connect student services with the students who desperately need them.

**For more information on the student services model, contact the NCRVE Office of Student Services (address on page 4).**

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## CAREER GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAMS THAT WORK!

**Wednesday, July 23, 1997**

**Sheraton Tacoma Hotel, Tacoma, Washington**

Exemplary career development programs will be showcased during an all day conference prior to the 1997 National SOICC (State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee) Conference in Tacoma, Washington at the Sheraton Tacoma Hotel.

These programs have been identified through the second annual search conducted by the U.S. Department of Education and the National Center's Office of Student Services in conjunction with the American Vocational Association and the National Association of State Career Development/Guidance Supervisors. The programs are selected based on strict, research-based criteria, evaluated by a national panel of experts, and validated by site visits.

Representatives from exemplary secondary and postsecondary settings will describe how their programs serve all students. They will demonstrate how to:

- assist K-12 and adult students to explore, plan, and train for a career that matches their interests and aptitudes;
- connect students to people, institutions, employers, and agencies who can help students realize their potential for life-long learning and a rewarding career;
- increase student enrollment in postsecondary institutions;
- improve employability of students; and
- require all students to develop a career portfolio prior to graduation.

Information on the SOICC Conference itself, which is July 24-26, is available at NOICC's website (http://www.state.ia.us/government/wd/noicc/), from Burton Carlson at 202-653-5665, or from Mary Ann Powell at 405-743-5156. The registration fee for the SOICC conference is $225.00 ($250.00 late registration).

Detailed registration information for *Career Guidance and Counseling Programs That Work* will be available soon. In the meantime, please contact Linda Iliff at NCRVE/OSS (217-333-0807) with any questions. (Attendance at the SOICC Conference is not required.)

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The Office of Student Services of the National Center for Research in Vocational Education, University of California, Berkeley, is housed at the University of Illinois. The Office of Student Services works nationally to promote the full range of quality programs and services that assist all students (secondary and postsecondary), including members of special populations, to successfully transition from school to work.

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